

Items of Church History—The Tunker Brethren.

BY OBED SNOWBERGER.

Probably soon after the commencement of the year 1880, I wrote a letter to Abram H. Cassel, of Harleysville, Montgomery county, Pa., stating three questions, which he answered at some length; and contain, I think, some interesting church history.

Ques. 1st. Did Alexander Mack or his friends, ever publish a hymn book before they left Germany?

Answer: No. Alexander Mack or his friends never published a hymn-book in Germany.

They used a hymn book called, "Die Davidische Psalter Spiel. It was a large book having nearly 1000 pages and over 1000 hymns—most of them very long ones.

Only a very few copies of it were brought to this country. Consequently the brethren were obliged to use different kinds of books in their public worship, which caused a great deal of confusion in their congregational singing until about 1740. Then the brethren abridged the old big "Psalter Spiel," besides adding a number of new hymns and published it under the new title of "Das Kleine Davidische Psalterspiel."

The first edition of which left the press in 1744. It was printed by Christopher Saur in Germantown, and was at once introduced into all the churches of the Brethren. The book soon became so much of a favorite, even among Christians of other denominations that four editions of it were printed by Saur in a short time, and by 1836 at least thirteen editions of it were printed in this country, and one edition of it was ordered from Europe. It is still extensively used in the German churches of the Brethren.

Q. 2nd. Don't you think some of the Brethren in Germany came out from the Mennonites?

Ans. We have no account of any of the Brethren coming out from the Mennonites, and I am very doubtful that any of them did. For so far as we have any account of them, they were mostly from the (German) Reformed or Presbyterians, and some from the "Inspiriten" (Inspired Association) and other sects. But none are mentioned as being Mennonites. I suppose because the Mennonites of that day were so near akin to the Brethren in their outward ordinances that they worshipped together and loved each other as brethren.

Q. 3rd. Did any church remain after the Brethren who came to America, had left Germany?

Ans. No church remained. For persecution became so fierce that they were driven from place to place, until then, most of them, finally came to America. Thirty entire families came over with Alexander Mack. Besides many more that came singly. Almost every vessel for a while brought some. And the rest either got cold and settled down on their lease again, or turned back to the churches from whence they had gone out, on account of the untold hardships they had to endure.

ABRAM H. CASSEL.

Harleysville, Pa., March 20, 1880.

REMARKS.

From other papers furnished by Cassel, we learn that "in the fall of the year 1719, about twenty families with Peter Becker at their head, emigrated to America from Serustervin, a province of West Friesland. They arrived in Philadelphia and settled principally in Germantown and its vicinity."

The 25th of December, 1723, was a day of unusual events among the Brethren. Hitherto there was no one who had taken it upon him to baptize and none were added to the church. On this day, by an agreement among the members, Peter Becker was set apart to be their minister. Six persons were baptized. In the evening there was a love-feast held at the house of John Gomery, with seventeen communicants besides the six that had just been baptized, making in all twenty-three. Of sisters there were six, of brethren, seventeen.

This meeting took place six years before Alexander Mack came to America, which was in 1729, and was the first lovefeast held by the church.

The term Presbyterians by some writers is applied to a class of people who existed in Germany—this according to the usages of writing church history, in my estimation is a mistake. I think that name ought to be reserved exclusively for that class of Christians who dissented from the Episcopal church of England. I doubt whether it can be said that there ever existed an established Presbyterian church in Germany.

The word presbyterian comes from the Greek presbyter, and hence those who contended for a form of church government, vested in the elders, were, in England, called Presbyterians.

P. S. Since the above was written, I have fully arrived at the conclusion that there were no Presbyterian churches in Germany, but that those who adhered to the more rigid elements of the German Reformed church were sometimes called Presbyterians by English writers.

The "Inspiriten" were the class of people in English called Mystics, because they dwelt much upon things invisible, and believed in being taught by the Spirit. It seems that in times and ages past, there existed in Germany a strong mystic element, in a manner under the surface, and outside of the Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed churches. I once asked a well informed man whether he knew by what church the "Marburger Gesang Buch" was published. He said he did not know, but he supposed it was published by the mystic wing of the Lutheran church. My opinion is, that he was about right. [In the selection of hymns there is much sameness between the Marburger Gesang Buch and the Davidische Psalterspiel, published by the Tunker Brethren. And since Cassel says the brethren abridged the large Psalterspiel, I very confidently infer that it was a mystic work.]

In a letter dated June 24th, 1880, Cassel says: "That 'Davidische Psalterspiel' used by the Brethren in Germany, was privately published without any imprint except the date, and used by the so-called 'Pietists,' popularly denominated, 'Die Schwaermer,' or enthusiasts, which abounded in Germany about the time the Brethren church was first organized, (1708); and which in the beginning consisted largely of that class of people. The same as did the first organization at Ephrata." (Lancaster Co., Pa., 1724.)

In Germany, the Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed, were the churches established by law. There were however many dissenters, who held meetings of their own, and these were called Pietists. The law being against them, they were compelled in some places to hold their meetings in a hidden way. Sometimes in the forests or in the mountains. This outside pressure and persecution, in all probability, had a tendency to make them mysterious people.—Quincy, Pa., Nov. 28, 1884.

The Baby Witness

A poor, pale seamstress was arraigned in Paris for theft. She appeared at the bar with her baby of eleven months on her arm. She went to get some work one day, and stole three gold coins of ten francs each. The money was missed soon after she had left her employer. And a servant was sent to her room to claim it. The servant found her about to quit the room with the three gold coins in her hand. She said to the servant, "I am going to carry them back to you." Nevertheless, she was carried to the commissioner of police, and he ordered her to be sent to the police court for trial. She was too poor to engage a lawyer, and when asked by the judge what she had to say for herself, she replied: "The day I went to my employer's, I carried my child with me. It was in my arms as it is now. I wasn't paying attention to it. There were several gold coins on the mantelpiece; and, unknown to me, it stretched out its little hand and seized three pieces, which I did not observe until I got home. I at once put on my bonnet, and was going back to my employer to return them, when I was arrested. This is the solemn truth, as I hope for Heaven's mercy."

The court could not believe this story. They upbraided the mother for her impudence in endeavor to palm off such a manifest lie for the truth. They besought her, for her own sake, to retract so absurd a tale; for it could have no effect but to oblige the court to sentence her to much severer punishment than they were disposed to inflict upon one so young, and evidently so deep in poverty.

These appeals had no effect, except to strengthen the poor mother's pertinacious adherence to her original story. As this firmness was sustained by that look of innocence which the most adroit criminal can never counterfeit, the court was at some loss to discover what decision justice demanded.

To relieve their embarrassment, one of the judges proposed to renew the scene described by the mother. Three gold coins were placed on the clerk's table. The mother was requested to assume the position in which she stood at her employer's house. Then a breathless pause in the court. The baby soon discovered the coins, eyed them for a moment, and then stretched forth its tiny hand, and clutched them in its fingers with a miser's eagerness. The mother was at once acquitted.—SEL.

He that won't be counseled can't be helped. The great event of to-day is usually but a trifle in the memory of to-morrow. A man's character is like a fence, it cannot be strengthened by whitewash.

The Closing Year.

An essay read by sister Sadie Kochendorfer, at the Prayer-meeting in New Enterprise, Dec. 28, 1884.

In reviewing the record of the old year, what is it we find? Are the pages going to speak well of us? Will they contain a list of good acts and words done and spoken in the right time and at the right place, or do they hold against us a list of failures, which soil the flowers in the wreath of time? When called to memory they prove not unfrequently a source of annoyance to such an extent that conscience seeks relief in the tears of regret. As we wander to and fro every day, we meet with difficulties which lead us to err. So apt are we to do wrong that it requires the most vigilant watch to guide,—the most earnest praying to keep out of temptation. "Ask and ye shall receive."—a short sentence yet how true and full of meaning. How many a seeker of the truth found this their consolation; how many a true disciple, wasted in strength, and failing in faith, looked around him for help, when to him came these encouraging words, "Ask and ye shall receive;" and in it sees that even he may be restored. It certainly has cheered thousands under discouraging circumstances and still is the same.

We should profit by past experience. Live lives better calculated to secure peace hereafter. At the opening of a New Year may we resolve to live better in the future than we have done in the past; ask for help in carrying out the resolutions. It may help us in living.

'Tis a bonny bright world  
Though its spaces of gloom  
So thickly are scattered  
For faith to illumine.  
There are dear lips of children  
To kiss away pain;  
There is work to be done  
And we toil not in vain.  
Who toils for the Master,  
In clouds and in sun,  
Shall surely at last  
Hear the Master's "Well done."

Cherry Grove, Va.

Our province is to report brother Swihart's protracted services at Mt. Zion, Va. Brother Swihart's theme is the Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible. He places Christ where the scriptures do, as the head of the church militant, leading to the church triumphant, where the mortal shall put on immortality if they build upon the Rock Christ Jesus.

During the progress of this meeting it was not the prerogative of the teacher to whip sinners, but to persuade men to believe. On this occasion four put on Christ and identified themselves with His church. One from the German Baptist, one from the Disciples, one from the Presbyterian church, and the other from the world. Hope they may be true to their profession by an upright walk and a chaste conversation; for if we seem to be good and bridle not our tongue, that unruly member, we may be sure our religion is vain. But, again, during the progress of this meeting the teacher reasoned on fidelity and infidelity contrasted, and skeptics were forced to say that he reasoned well, and deserved much credit. We think brother J. H. Swihart has left good impressions behind, and if those who have put on Christ will keep their vessels well filled with oil and lamps well trimmed and burning, much good may yet be done at this place.

Brother Swihart started this afternoon, being the 19th of December, to organize a church in Rockingham county. We believe the Holy Spirit will accompany him wherever he goes, and, as at Mt. Zion, help to guide the traveler to Christ the living fountain. C. N. SPITZER.

The worst men often give the best advice. The wealth of a soul is measured by how much it can feel; its poverty by how little. Envy not the appearance of happiness in any man, for thou knowst not his secret griefs. The selfish, loving only themselves, are loved by no one, so selfishness is moral suicide. We must consider humanity as a man who continually grows old, and always learns. Those days are lost in which we do no good. Those worse than lost in which we do evil. Patience is not passive; on the contrary, it is active, it is concentrated strength.